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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 000830

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR IO/RHS AND DRL/MLGA AND NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2019

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TS](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: TUNISIA AND UNGA THIRD COMMITTEE: COUNTRY SPECIFIC
RESOLUTIONS

REF: A. TUNIS 801 (NOTAL)

[B](#). TUNIS 788 (NOTAL)

[C](#). STATE 116268

[D](#). STATE 109397

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

Summary

[1](#). (C) The Ambassador explained U.S. opposition to no-vote actions, and requested Tunisian support (or at least abstention) on pending human rights resolutions concerning Iran, Burma, and North Korea in a November 12 meeting with Mokhtar Chaouachi, the MFA's Director-General for UN and International Organization Affairs at the Tunisian MFA. This discussion followed a detailed conversation between the Ambassador and Minister of State Saida Chtoui, one of two deputies to Foreign Minister Abdallah, on October 30 (ref A), and a general presentation the Embassy made to the MFA on October 23 (ref B). In the November 12 meeting, Chaouachi was non-committal but took on board the USG's high level of interest in the resolutions. In order to secure Tunisian support, the Embassy recommends the following steps: A) A call from Under Secretary Burns to MFA Secretary of State Chtoui; B) Consider offering U.S. support for Tunisia's "Year of the Youth" proposal (ref A) in exchange for favorable Tunisian votes on the country-specific resolutions; C) Convoking Tunisia's Ambassador in Washington to press the case. End summary.

No-Action Motions and Country Specific Resolutions

[2](#). (C) In a November 12 meeting, the Ambassador pressed Mokhtar Chaouachi, MFA Director-General for UN and International Organizations, for Tunisian rejection, or at least abstention, in the anticipated no-action motions on the draft resolutions concerning human rights in Iran and Burma, and for a vote in favor of the draft resolution on the DPRK. Underlining the long-standing U.S. view that no-action motions are frequently abused to undermine the UN's mission, the Ambassador also stressed that the outrageous crackdown on Iranian democracy advocates in June, and Burma's ongoing atrocious practices, merited vigorous international condemnation. Chaouachi offered a non-committal response, but acknowledged that Tunisia recognized the USG's strong views on these country-specific resolutions. As reported in ref A, the Ambassador's October 30 conversation with MFA Secretary of State Saida Chtoui was almost identical.

What the Tunisians Want: The "Year of the Youth"

¶3. (C) Chaouachi, like Chtoui two weeks earlier, pressed the Ambassador for U.S. support for Tunisia's proposal to designate 2010 the "International Year of the Youth." Chaouachi stressed the "great importance" and "urgency" of seizing this moment in history to inculcate the world's youth with a "universal" and "noble" spirit of moderation, tolerance, solidarity, and high moral values. Procedural objections raised by other countries were substantively flimsy, he argued: There is already a preponderance of international activities benefiting youth that would fall neatly under the umbrella of the Tunisian "Year of the Youth" proposal. One (apparently face-saving) compromise the Tunisians might find acceptable was the Turkish proposal to commence the "Year" in August 2010, Chaouachi underlined.

¶4. (C) Comment: As noted ref A, the Tunisians are marketing their youth-year idea as a personal initiative of President Ben Ali. The proposal is an outgrowth of a 2008 domestic campaign (of dubious merit) to engage Tunisian youth by establishing a new "pact" stressing mutual loyalty and solidarity between the state and the country's youth. We believe the MFA is working overtime to give the presidential palace a deliverable it can use domestically, showing the whole world lining up behind a Ben Ali initiative. End comment.

Securing Tunisian Support

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¶5. (C) Tunisia's voting record, and its own vulnerability to criticism on human rights, suggests it is unlikely we will secure Tunisia's vote in favor of any of the three resolutions - Iran, Burma, or the DPRK. Tunisia did, in 2008, absent itself from the votes on Burma and the DPRK (it voted in favor of Iran's no action motion). We believe taking the following actions would offer the best chance of securing Tunisian support, or at least abstention, on the three country-specific resolutions:

A) A telephone call from Under Secretary Burns to MFA Minister of State Saida Chtoui: Chtoui, one of two deputies to Foreign Minister Abdallah, told the Ambassador during their October 30 meeting that Under Secretary Burns is held in very high regard in Tunis. The Minister of State appears to be the Foreign Minister's point person on multilateral issues; in addition to convoking Ambassadors on the "Year of Youth," she led the Tunisian delegation to the Forum for the Future in Marrakech. Foreign Minister Abdallah, by contrast, is not always as well-versed on UN issues.

B) Trade votes: We fully agree with the Department's inclination to remain neutral on Tunisia's "Year of the Youth" proposal. Nonetheless, the Department may wish to consider trading our support for the Tunisian plan, which they care about deeply, for affirmative Tunisian votes on the three resolutions we care about.

C) Convoke the Ambassador: The Department may wish to convoke Habib Mansour, Tunisia's Ambassador in Washington, to press its case. We note Ambassador Gray has twice been convoked by the MFA to discuss the "Year of the Youth."

GRAY